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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 413th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 1 October 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of the Czech Republic (CRC/C/11/Add.11; CRC/C/Q/CZE/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Somol, Ms. Novotná, Ms. Jeřábková, Mr. Zeman, Mr. Sovák, Mr. Holub and Mr. Cink (Czech Republic) resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. NOVOTNÁ (Czech Republic), replying to a question Mrs. Ouedraogo had asked at the preceding meeting, said that, under Czech law, a minor was a person up to 18 years of age. If a 15-year-old single mother gave birth, a guardian would be appointed for her child, as she would not have parental rights. If, when she turned 16, the courts consented to her marriage, she would then become an adult with parental rights. Fourteen- or 15-year-old mothers, who were no exception in the Czech Republic, needed social and legal protection and help, for example with the preparation of paternity suits and applications for State welfare benefits, as well as guidance in respect of child care.

3. In reply to the question whether a child could apply for assistance, she said that the underlying principle of the draft Law on Social and Legal Assistance was that parents had a duty to care for their child. If parents were unable or unwilling to do so, it was the State's obligation to assist both the parents and the child and, in that case, the child could request assistance to protect his life and his right to healthy development and the State had to grant such assistance. It was therefore incumbent on social workers to help the child, take his views into account and arrange for his care.

4. If a conflict arose between parents and their children or between the parents themselves, a guardian had to be appointed by the courts or administrative authorities.

5. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that Romany interests in the Czech Republic were defended and promoted by more than 100 organizations, the largest of which naturally participated in the political life of the country. Some Roma were members of the national parliament, others were regional or local councillors. They could compete in election campaigns on the same footing as other candidates. Roma also received the same wages for the same job and had the same entitlement to social welfare benefits as other citizens.

6. Ms. JEŘÁBKOVÁ (Czech Republic) said that, under Act No. 40/1993, which had been adopted after the split with Slovakia, the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for applying the law on Czech citizenship in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. In the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, everyone had had federal citizenship, as well as either Czech or Slovak nationality. Since the two countries had gone their separate ways, special provisions had facilitated the acquisition of Czech citizenship by

Slovaks, who had been able to opt for Czech nationality until 30 June 1994; after that, they had been able to obtain Czech citizenship through a simplified procedure in accordance with certain specific conditions. A total of some 382,000 Slovaks had become Czech citizens so far.

7. The Romany community had made many complaints about the impact of Act No. 40/1993 on its people. The Ministry of the Interior had held meetings with the local registrars who had been helping Roma to apply for Czech citizenship. Nevertheless, a special programme set up for the Roma had been shunned by that ethnic group, as they had regarded it as a form of discrimination.

8. Council of Europe experts had visited the Czech Republic twice to advise it about amendments to Act No. 40/1993. One subsequent amendment had embodied the Council's recommendation that the condition that a Slovak applicant should not have been convicted of a serious crime during the previous five years should be waived if that person had been continuously resident in Czech territory since 31 December 1992. Of the 1,372 applications processed under the waiver arrangements to date, only 27 had been rejected on the grounds that the person in question had a bad criminal record.

9. A 1996 amendment to the Act on the Residence of Aliens in the Czech Republic had given foreign children up to the age of 15 who were living in Czech institutions or with Czech guardians an entitlement to legal residence in the Republic, together with Czech citizenship, health care and welfare benefits. If they were over 15, they themselves could apply for Czech citizenship.

10. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic) stressed that trafficking in children was regarded as a serious crime by the Penal Code. There had been only two cases since 1990, both of which had involved the sale of children for adoption and were still being investigated. In the first case, which had occurred in 1993, a Russian mother had sold her child to a Czech citizen, but the child had been returned unharmed to its mother within 24 hours.

11. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) had taken note of Mrs. Karp's suggestion that activities in connection with the Convention should be coordinated at a higher level than that of ministerial staff and he fully agreed with her that it was necessary to instil the idea of protecting the general human dignity of schoolchildren in teachers. Instruction about the Convention was an obligatory part of the school curriculum. The new teaching methods employed for that purpose were based on education through dialogue rather than learning by rote and were closely akin to Comenius' theory of teaching by playing.

12. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic) said that his authorities were in favour of a psychologist or social worker being present when children were questioned by the police. At all events, a third person always had to accompany a child to an interrogation, so that the police officer was not alone with the child. It had been suggested that a child might be spared the torment of having to testify in court if it could be heard at the main Child Crisis Centre in Prague. Cooperation between the Centre's staff and the police authorities would ensure that the requisite information could be elicited through properly formulated questions. Child crisis centres had been set up throughout the

Czech Republic and their staff had been trained in Prague. The Czech police authorities were familiar with the technique used by psychologists in which children were asked to draw pictures in order to describe a situation.

13. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic) said that criminological data could be obtained from the statistics contained in the yearbooks of the National Statistical Office and various ministries, but, unfortunately, figures relating to domestic violence could be obtained only by looking at actual case files and court records, and that was a laborious task. It was, however, possible to gather data from that source about victims in the 14 to 18 age group.

14. Mr. HOLUB (Czech Republic) said that the golden rule for judges specializing in investigations involving children, who, in some cases, were represented by a guardian or legal counsel, was that the best interests of the child should always prevail. Judges could institute proceedings on their own motion, if they considered that such a step was necessary. Court practice in that respect had been improved as a result of the ratification of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms because its article 32 indicated that the interests of the child had to be the overriding consideration. The concept of the best interests of the child had been embodied in the new Family Act, but, in fact, many court decisions to date had gone beyond the provisions of the existing Act in order to protect the best interests of the child.

15. On the question of access, he said that, in the past, under the Family Act, access had been granted only to one or other of the parents. Now, however, following adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, access could also be given to grandparents, brothers, sisters, or other close relatives and, in an increasing number of cases, judges were making orders for what was known as "common custody". In all cases, the best interests of the child were seen as the paramount consideration.

16. In the same way, the child's own views were now taken into account to the fullest extent possible. The judge would always put questions to the child in person and ensure that it had the necessary privacy during interrogations. In complicated cases involving custody and access, the child might even be sent to a special medical institution for a week or a fortnight to avoid the risk of undue influence on the part of the father or mother. The basic principle of respect for the opinions of the child was to be embodied in the new Family Act. The child also had the right to ask to be represented by a lawyer, whose services would, of course, be free of charge.

17. With regard to respect for the child's human dignity, he pointed out that corporal punishment was prohibited in all schools. When inflicted on a child by parents in the home it could constitute either an administrative offence, punishable by a fine, or a criminal offence subject to very severe penalties.

18. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that no national statistics were available for the incidence of incest and domestic violence, although information could be obtained from police records and from documentation compiled by the various ministries.

19. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic), replying to Mr. Rabah's question on the role of the police in the field of crime prevention, said that prevention, not only in relation to children, but also in relation to the public generally, was seen as a priority police task. A special crime prevention department had been set up, which played an important part in preventing undesirable social phenomena. The department organized lectures in secondary schools and universities on how to prevent crime and problems such as drug abuse and compulsive gambling.

20. Great use was made of the media for preventive purposes, giving publicity not only to crimes, but also to success stories, such as cases of parents who had reformed and cases of children whose situation had improved. Very good clear-up rates for crimes involving the ill-treatment of children had been achieved after a precise definition of what constituted ill-treatment had been publicized.

21. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic), replying to questions from Mrs. Karp and Mr. Rabah, said that the Penal Code specifically provided that parents had the right to be present and to participate during any court proceedings involving juveniles. Of course, if the parents themselves were guilty of offences against their children, the situation was different and the place of the parents would be taken by social workers or guardians.

22. The Penal Code made very little provision for probation as an alternative to punishment following the usual penal process, but it seemed a promising solution and he hoped that it would be introduced in future. A recent innovation which had proved effective in dealing with juvenile delinquency was the system of mediation. Domestic violence was now viewed as a serious crime, punishable under the Penal Code. Pre-trial detention of juveniles as part of the penal process was practised only to a very limited extent and was governed by strict rules under the Code.

23. Child prostitution was found only in border areas and usually involved Romany children or children who had absconded from children's homes. Not all cases led to prosecution, but he admitted that it had proved difficult to find a solution to the problem. Unfortunately, it was to be assumed that the number of child prostitutes was higher than that indicated in the statistics.

24. Mrs. JEŘÁBKOVÁ (Czech Republic) said that her Government had submitted a report to the recent World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm dealing with child prostitution, trafficking in children and child pornography. It thus had recent data available on the extent of the phenomenon in the country. There was no specific legislation governing child prostitution, although adult prostitution and procuring were both punishable under the Penal Code. Endangering the moral upbringing of youth and sexual abuse of children were likewise criminal offences. In 1995, there had been 239 cases of procuring, 95 per cent of which had resulted in prosecution.

25. As already pointed out, child prostitution was not a very widespread problem in the Czech Republic. It had increased following the opening of the

border in 1989 and the influx of tourists from Western countries. Generally, the perpetrators of such crimes towards children were foreign nationals. Her delegation could provide the Committee with copies of the report to the Stockholm Congress if further details were required.

26. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic), replying to a question from Mr. Rabah on the treatment of juveniles, and particularly girls, in prison, said that there were special sections for juveniles both in men's prisons and in women's prisons and special educational programmes were provided for them. There were as yet no open prisons in the Czech Republic, but it was hoped to introduce that system in future.

27. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said it had been asked whether there were any statistics on the incidence of discrimination against minority groups and also on the mortality rate of Romany children as compared to that of Czech children generally. Unfortunately, as he had already explained, no distinction was made between minority groups and the rest of the population when collecting data and thus no comparative statistics were available.

28. Mr. CINK (Czech Republic), replying to Mrs. Sardenberg's question on how children and young people could express their opinions on the education system and bring about changes, said that there was no mechanism whereby children could influence the education system directly. However, school councils could be set up to enable pupils to participate in the decision-making process and young people could join them on reaching 18 years of age. Play-acting in "children's parliaments" or "children's United Nations", for example, was also encouraged in schools to help make pupils aware of how a democratic society worked.

29. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic), replying to the question on what was to be understood by "extremism", said that, in the Czech Republic, extremism would not imply activities such as hostage-taking or bomb attacks, but it was nevertheless taken very seriously. Due to its position at the heart of Europe, the country was very open to influences from abroad, particularly fascist and neo-nazi movements whose members attacked minority groups. In retaliation, members of such minorities - notably the Roma - often formed armed groups of their own, leading to a potentially violent situation. The Government had realized there was urgent need to tackle the problem and had appointed experts in the field to serve in police departments all over the country. For police purposes, extremists were defined as persons or groups who deviated from generally recognized and accepted norms.

30. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked whether she had understood correctly that there had been an amendment to the law on citizenship that had allowed many people of Slovak nationality to acquire Czech citizenship. Did that procedure also apply to the Romany community or were they still regarded as Slovaks?

31. Her question about the participation of children in schools had been prompted by concern for the implementation of article 12 of the Convention. Allowing children to express their views was a challenging task; it was not always easy to introduce measures to allow children to play an active part in the home, in school and in the normal life of the country. Even though there was a need for parental guidance tailored to the age of the child, as the

Convention acknowledged, it was still important to take account of the child's opinion. In schools especially, where the socialization of the child began, it was essential that children should learn how to live in a democracy and to express their views under the conditions of everyday life.

32. The degree to which extremist views were held in the Czech Republic had been explained, but it was not clear whether adults or children were principally involved. How were children and young people affected by extremist trends?

33. There appeared to be a heartening decrease in the institutionalization of children in the Republic. However, she had been surprised at the wide variety of institutions for children which were described in the report, and implied that a fairly high degree of institutionalization still remained. What kind of children were served by those institutions? What were the Government's current plans for taking children out of institutions?

34. According to information provided, there had been a number of cases of infants - the so-called E55 babies - being abandoned at the German border. She asked for more details and asked what measures were being taken to deal with the problem. Adoption was apparently an area of much public debate in the Republic, but she noted that no answer had been given in the written reply to question 21 of the list of issues on the right of children to know the identity of their natural parents.

35. Mr. KOLOSOV said he had the impression that some non-governmental organizations in the Czech Republic were more concerned about social problems relating to children than official representatives of government bodies were. Although some of the criticism they expressed might arise merely from opposition to current policies, it could not all be dismissed as irrelevant. There was therefore a need to improve relations between government institutions and non-governmental organizations, since cooperation between them could only benefit children.

36. Although the citizenship issue was claimed not to be a cause of concern, there were a number of worrying aspects relating to specific cases, as in families where one parent was stateless, for example. He asked whether the Czech Republic was a party to the 1994 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which could be helpful in solving such problems. Another problem presented as a minor issue was child prostitution. However, there was much cause for concern about the impetus to that trade exerted by affluent Western neighbours. The Czech Republic was also being used as a country of transit of child prostitutes, both boys and girls, to the West.

37. Child pornography was another matter of considerable concern and a problem not confined to the Czech Republic. Freedom of information was rightly welcomed, but the explosion of the mass media had led to abuse and some means had to be found to limiting excesses such as child pornography. The European Convention on Transfrontier Television was a step in that direction; he asked whether the Czech Republic had ratified it. Even though the present number of cases in the country was low, they would inevitably increase in future unless action was taken.

38. Street children were another phenomenon, created in part by the commercialization of consciousness in young people. The transition from a centrally planned to a market economy had brought with it the desire for money, which some young people were prepared to acquire by any means available, such as prostitution, petty theft and drug trafficking. Because of its geographical position, the Czech Republic was particularly vulnerable to that phenomenon and consideration of how to protect such children from such influences was necessary.

39. The impact of the environment on the health of children and young people should be the subject of major attention in a highly industrialized country such as the Czech Republic. Was anything being done in that respect?

40. Mrs. KARP, acknowledging the fact that the law had settled the issue of the citizenship of children in institutions, asked how well in practice the children themselves and the heads of the institutions concerned were aware of the avenues open to them.

41. On the subject of child prostitution, she asked what the position of the Czech Republic was with regard to the plan of action drawn up by the World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Available information showed that the prostitution and sexual abuse of boys - sexual abuse both in the domestic context and outside it - was rife. Did the Republic afford boys the same level of protection as girls? Was there any move to apply the recommendation to make the clients of child prostitutes above the age of sexual consent - in other words, between 16 and 18 years of age - liable to prosecution? There was a difference between sexual consent on the part of an adult and consent to exploitation on the part of a child. Did the Republic intend to apply the recommendation that child prostitutes should not be criminalized, but instead be regarded as victims to be rehabilitated?

42. She understood that even light corporal punishment - such as smacking or spanking, considered as criminal offences when applied to adults - was officially regarded as an infringement of the human dignity of the child. What was being done to explain to parents that such action, and not merely severe corporal punishment, was unacceptable?

43. The problem of Romany children was complex and would take a long time to solve. Was any thought being given to affirmative action for such children in the field of education and social activity in order to break the vicious circle of educational deprivation leading to inability to integrate in society as an adult?

44. Since information was necessary to draw up policies and determine the possible relationship between domestic violence, incest and the phenomenon of street children, she asked whether any research was planned into incest, child abuse and domestic violence.

45. Mrs. PALME said that she shared much of the concern Mrs. Karp had shown over various issues. On the question of citizenship, she asked what happened to children placed in homes in the Czech Republic, but born to parents who had

lived in the Slovak Republic before the dissolution of the Federation. Although such children were legally entitled to apply for Czech citizenship, she wished to know whether they were aware of that and received any advice on the subject.

46. She understood that there were many teenage pregnancies in the Czech Republic - a problem not confined to that country. Were any statistics being collected to see whether low income levels and difficult living circumstances were a contributory factor in such pregnancies? Were clinics available to advise young people on reproductive health and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies or was such information given through the schools?

47. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that the provision of a "safety line" making psychological guidance available to children over the telephone on a 24-hour basis, as described in the written reply to question 24 of the list of issues, was to be applauded. She asked for more details of the operation of the line and wondered what provision was made for children who did not have a telephone at home.

48. Paragraph 118 of the report referred to the fact that placement in foster care ended on the divorce of the foster parents or the death of one of them. What happened in cases where the remaining spouse wished to keep the child and the child wished to remain in such care? Such action might well be in the best interests of the child. Who made the decision in such cases?

49. Mr. RABAH expressed concern about the possible working conditions of minors in employment, especially girls. He asked whether the Czech Republic was considering applying ILO Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in that respect. He would appreciate information on the situation with regard to child labour in the Republic, including the relations between children in employment and their parents, their place of employment, whether farm or factory, and whether they were ever engaged in night work.

50. No information had been provided on street children, who were a common phenomenon in countries undergoing economic difficulties. What was the situation with regard to such children and what measures were taken to help them?

51. Mrs. KARP said that considerable efforts were being made in the Czech Republic to integrate children with disabilities into the ordinary school system, but difficulties were being experienced in finding enough skilled staff to assist in that process; as a result, more disabled children would remain in institutions than really needed such care. Were any other measures planned to encourage the integration of disabled children into the ordinary life of the community?

52. Although the number of children in institutions might be decreasing, the Czech Republic still appeared to be trying to find alternatives to institutions. She would be interested to know what current thinking on the matter was.

53. Ms. JEŘÁBKOVÁ (Czech Republic), referring to the question of citizenship, said that, before the dissolution of the Federation, every citizen of the Federation had had either Czech or Slovak citizenship. After dissolution, all Slovak citizens resident in the Czech Republic, whatever their ethnic origin, were entitled to apply for Czech citizenship if they so wished. The law was quite clear on that point. It was not, however, possible to force people to take steps to acquire Czech nationality. The Romany community was often reluctant to get involved in such legal procedures. Special offices had been opened at the local level where Roma could go for information on acquiring Czech citizenship, but many were not interested.

54. The Czech Republic was not yet a party to the two Conventions relating to statelessness, but was planning to accede to them and to the new Council of Europe convention on the subject, when the latter was opened for signature in November 1997. Current Czech law on citizenship was not incompatible with any of those Conventions. The European Convention allowed latitude to States in deciding whether their citizens could hold citizenship of two or more States or of one only.

55. In reply to Mrs. Karp's question on children in institutions, she drew attention to the relevant legal provisions whereby children not citizens of the Czech Republic and without the right of permanent abode who had been placed in institutional care in the Republic or in the care of a person with the right of permanent abode in the Republic were entitled to remain in the Republic for the duration of such care. That provision made Czech citizenship open to all such children.

56. A question had also been asked about the child's ability to apply for Czech citizenship on his own initiative. Every director of a children's home or institution had been asked by the Ministry of Education to determine the status of all children in their care. They therefore had the duty to act as the child's representative in applying for citizenship or, after the child had reached the age of 15, to advise him on means for applying for citizenship. Residence in an institution would continue after the age of 15 for as long as it was required by the child.

57. The CHAIRPERSON said that Mrs. Karp's question had referred not to the opportunities offered by the law, but to the degree of awareness of heads of institutions of the need to ensure citizenship for children before the age of 15 in order to prevent them from becoming stateless.

58. Mr. CINK (Czech Republic) said that all heads of children's homes had been required to attend special training courses on the application of the principles of the Convention in their establishments.

59. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic) said that extremist attitudes and behaviour were problems that most often occurred in the area of juvenile crime. The relevant cases were thus generally handled by the juvenile crime departments of the police.

60. Mr. ZEMAN (Czech Republic) said that he was rather surprised by the concerns expressed about street children, of whom, to his knowledge, there were very few in the Czech Republic. When the police found children or minors

apparently living on the streets, appropriate action was taken immediately to provide them with the necessary care. There were, of course, homeless people, but they were generally adults and were well known to the police.

61. Ms. NOVOTNÁ (Czech Republic), providing clarifications on the "E55 babies", said that they were not orphans, but children who had been found in the vicinity of the E55 motorway, where their mothers often worked as prostitutes, and who had been placed for a certain period of time in institutional care in northern Bohemia. Contrary to what the Czech public and the international community had been led to believe, the children had been given proper care and attention by the State. Attempts had been made to find their parents and, when that had not been possible, the Czech courts had appointed a guardian to decide what should be done with them. What was already a difficult situation had, however, at one stage been compounded by the fact that many of the children involved were citizens of the Slovak Republic, whose Government had been anxious to find a speedy solution to the problem.

62. With reference to the comment that NGOs seemed more concerned about children than the State, she provided statistics that proved otherwise. Some 640,000 families were registered annually with the social and legal protection services and about 267,000 received direct assistance. Each year, the State represented children in around 130,000 cases relating to judicial, administrative or other proceedings. In 100,000 such cases, the social and legal protection services represented the children or acted as "collision" guardians.

63. In reply to a question concerning the large number of children currently in institutional care, she explained that the figure of 12,000 included children in specialized centres for the disabled, as well as those placed by court order or their parents in children's homes. A debate was currently under way in the Czech Republic on the possibility of the State providing assistance to the families of the disabled. The idea was that an adequate allowance should be provided to enable a member of the family to stay at home and take proper care of the disabled person in question. That would be in line with the general trend towards the integration of the disabled in society.

64. Foster care was not a new concept in the Czech Republic. Such arrangements had existed before the Second World War and had been reintroduced in 1963. At present, there were some 5,000 children in foster care and approximately 400 children were given homes by foster families each year. It was worth noting that the average annual figure for adoption was 500. Children placed in foster care and their foster parents received State allowances.

65. Mr. HOLUB (Czech Republic) confirmed that no major changes were planned to current provisions governing adoption under Czech family law. The general policy was to guarantee the anonymity of the biological parents and the secrecy of the relevant adoption procedures. That was regarded as the best way of ensuring the successful integration of adopted children in their new families. It was the responsibility of adoptive parents to choose the right moment to inform the children of their true origins. Children who were really

keen to know more about their biological parents could always consult the birth register, which would show any changes made to their birth certificate.

66. Mrs. PALME commended the Czech delegation on its report, which showed that great strides had been made in the Czech Republic in a very short period of time. Of particular note were its efficient health service and education system, its contribution and follow-up to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the possibility of its ratifying the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. Efforts under way to train teachers and professionals and change attitudes towards children must be pursued. She hoped that the Czech Republic would heed the concerns expressed by the members of the Committee and, in adjusting to the new economic order, would not overlook the needs of the most vulnerable groups of society.

67. Mrs. KARP said that the Committee had indeed been most fortunate, for the large number of specialists represented on the Czech Republic's delegation had made for a very constructive dialogue. The composition of the delegation in itself was an indication that the country was on the right track and taking its obligations seriously. She nonetheless emphasized the need for a multidisciplinary approach to children's issues in general and the importance of a holistic social development process in which all sectors of society, including NGOs, minority groups and children would be made partners. She hoped that the Government would publicize the outcome of the dialogue with the Committee.

68. Mrs. SARDENBERG requested the Czech Government to take due account of the provisions of the Convention relating to institutional care, particularly with regard to placement review and standards in such institutions. She also appealed to the Government to reconsider its reservation to the Convention on adoption. The country was going through a unique moment in its history and many challenges lay ahead. She hoped that children would henceforth be included in the political agenda of the Czech Republic and that the Convention would be used as a political tool to improve their conditions.

69. Mr. KOLOSOV recalled that each State party must ensure the rights provided for in the Convention to every child within its jurisdiction and not merely to its own citizens. Furthermore, he appealed to the Government, on behalf of separated fathers in the Czech Republic, to pay due attention to article 9, paragraph 3, of the Convention and ensure the rights of children to maintain contact with both parents following their separation. In the overwhelming majority of cases, mothers were given custody of their children and it was difficult to ensure the enforcement of the law regarding the right of fathers to maintain contact with them. That posed a particular problem for many Russian fathers and he imagined that the situation was similar in the Czech Republic.

70. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that, although progress had been made in the Czech Republic in implementing the Convention, much work remained to be done, particularly with regard to harmonizing domestic legislation and disseminating information on the Convention. She endorsed the remarks of previous speakers

concerning the minority population and, although she was aware of the difficulties involved, stressed the need to pursue efforts to improve on the situation.

71. Mr. RABAH said that, over and above the enactment of new legislation, steps must be taken to harmonize national policies with the basic tenets of the Convention. He hoped that the dialogue with the Committee would prove useful in that respect. In adopting such an approach, the Czech Republic would be laying the foundations for a better future for its children.

72. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) thanked the Committee for affording his country the opportunity to engage in such an interesting and interactive discussion. The expert views of the members of the Committee had certainly provided plenty of food for thought for subsequent discussion at the ministerial and government levels in the Czech Republic. Written information on questions which the delegation had been unable to deal with owing to time constraints would be forwarded to the Committee in due course. The Czech Republic was in the process of amending its legislation and realized that greater efforts were required to implement policies that would ensure the protection of children's rights. He assured the Committee that every effort would be made to publicize as widely as possible the outcome of the dialogue, which on balance was positive, although the delegation was aware that the Czech Republic still had a long way to go.

73. The CHAIRPERSON said she was glad that the delegation's overall assessment of the dialogue was positive, stressing that, if, on occasion, the members of the Committee had seemed to insist on certain issues, it was merely because, like the delegation, their aim was to achieve the best for children in the Czech Republic. The status that had been accorded to the Convention in the Czech Republic augured well for the future implementation of the instrument. The initial report was merely the first step in a long, but gradual process of change. The Committee looked forward to details of further achievements in the Czech Republic's next periodic report. In the meantime, it stood ready to provide any advice or assistance required. Like other speakers, she had been greatly impressed by the highly qualified delegation and there could be no doubt that the future of children in the Czech Republic was in very good hands.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.